



MINUTES

GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM Second Quarter Council Meeting June 3, 2009 - 3:00 PM

Call To Order

A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order.

Present at the meeting were:

Council Members: Steve Stancil, Chairman, John Bembry, Stacy Patton, Brent Dykes, Chris Clark, and Robert Farris .

Approval of the Minutes

Chairman Stancil presented minutes from the March 4, 2009 GLCP meeting for approval. Robert Farris stated that Dickson Forest spelling needed to be corrected to Dixon. John Bembry made a motion seconded by Stacy Patton to approve the minutes with the one correction. The motion passed unanimously.

Review of Budget and Legislative Activity

Curt Soper stated that 101,976 acres have been permanently protected since inception of the program; 53 grants/loans totaling 69,663 acres protected and 107 certified tax credit projects totaling 39,168 acres. The state's investment is \$67 million. The Governor requested \$5 million for FY2010 for local land conservation grants with \$0 appropriated. Senate Bill 55 was passed during the FY2009 Session and signed into law. This will help owners of conservation easement properties with their assessed value and extends the period for the Forest Protection Act application in 2009.

During the FY2010 Legislative Session GEFA will propose \$10 million in FY2011 budget request to the Office of Planning and Budget. GEFA will also work drafting amendments to the Georgia Land Conservation Act to accommodate loans to NGO's in a "bridge" financing capacity.

New Grant Request

Curt Soper presented a grant request \$6,000,000 for the Rayonier Forest Phase I project. This acquisition of 7,180 acres is the first of a planned two-phased project which will eventually conserve over 14,000 total acres for use as a conservation and Wildlife Management Area. The entire property encompasses 20 miles of frontage on the Altamaha River, and falls within five miles of roughly 83,000 acres that have already been preserved through the GLCP and other mechanisms. The property contains an incredible variety of ecosystems, such as freshwater wetlands, intertidal forest, and longleaf pine. This diverse landscape supports a wide array of birds and other wildlife species, including at least 17 State-listed species. The regional scale and natural resource values that characterize this acquisition including some champion sized tree specimens qualify it as a project of statewide significance. The property will first be purchased by The Nature Conservancy and eventually sold to the State. An appraisal has been completed on the property with an estimated value of \$12,780,000. A motion was made by John Bembry and seconded by Chris Clark to approve a \$6,000,000 Georgia Land Conservation grant for the Rayonier Forest Phase I project. The motion was unanimously approved.

Program Update and Report on Conservation Values Mapping and Program Outreach

Updates: Curt Soper stated that staff continues to work on outreach and marketing and continuing to do a series of landowner workshops targeting large private land owners. We have met with CPA associations and estate attorney groups, targeting the Estate Planning Councils around the state to get folks to think about having conservation being included in their wills. We have started presenting a GLCP mapping Charrette to a number of conservation groups to get good broad input. With the Stimulus Bill that was passed the program looked for money for land conservation and found one program through the NRCS which is an emergency flood control program and there is money on a national competitive basis to acquire conservation easements in floodplains. The idea is that you would reduce flood damage in areas that are prone to floods. We spread the word in Georgia and 27,000 acres were submitted by Georgia landowners requesting a \$122 million. We do not know how many will be funded here in Georgia and it will all be through the NRCS but we were successful in getting some landowners interested in conservation.

Curt stated that our website continues to be visited and we get close to 1,000 visits a month with about 20% of them looking at the tax credit information. GBA does a great job of handling our website and providing detailed reports. At our last meeting we talked about using social networking, targeting a different audience, Andrew has been working on it we now have a wikipedia page, we are linked with a couple other websites and working on twitter, having a facebook page and linking into the Conserve Georgia website.

Another area we are very active in is encouraging conservation easements to be donated to the State of Georgia. The Council has approved \$400,000 to reimburse the agencies that holds the easements for out of pocket cost for survey, attorney costs to close the project and the agency purchasing title insurance on the easement. We are still seeing considerable interest in these donations.

Mapping: Chris Canalos of DNR stated that the ten GLCP conservation criteria are each represented through one or more types of GIS data which have been mapped in an additive, or layered, fashion for the entire state. The seven available raster and polygon layers are presented first. Each individual data layer is shown in a presence/absence form with darkened areas illustrating the presence of a physical feature and white areas indicating its absence. These layers are then overlaid on top of each other to create the Base Map, in which the darkest areas represent the presence of more criteria than lighter areas. Subsequent maps add line and point layers to the Base Map. These maps can be further modified by substituting different data layers, showing areas of varying criteria intensities in color, adding other themed layers, changing the scale to a "close-up" view and filling in existing conservation areas.

Preview of June 4 Field Visit

Curt Soper stated that the Council will be touring a project that is actively being considered for a conservation easement donation on a particular piece of property called the Mopani Project that is used to preserve the indigo snake and its habitat. The second stop will be the Broxton Rocks Preserve. We will be departing at 8:15 am for the visits.

Emerging Issues

Stacy Patton stated that the Minerva company is half developer and half asset management. Currently they are looking at ideas for quicker revenue generation. One of the things they have been doing is bidding on foreclosure properties from banks and looking at pieces of land that need to be saved and was wondering if there any way that funding could be made through GEFA to get a Regional Development Authority to partner to go in and come up with a creative project. Curt Soper stated that the loan program could be made available but that the issue is how the loans would be paid back.

John Bembery stated that the Council needs to work towards making the loan funds more attractive. Curt Soper stated that there are 3 reasons why the loan funds are not moving: 1) we are unable to carry out bridge loans with the NGO's; 2) money is tight for local governments and it is hard for them

to justify land acquisition for conservation purposes; 3) GEFA's loan rates(3% interest rate plus closing fees) makes them not marketable. Chairman Stancil asked Curt to develop a possible list of financial resources that might be available so that we can get a better idea of what types of funds are available for conservation. Curt Soper and Phil Foil will look at how the terms could be improved and be made more attractive.

Chris Clark asked has the process been made easier for the donated easements and do we always need to have a current or new survey for a project. Curt stated that we do have a new standard conservation easement legal form and we have taken out some of the clauses and simplified the process somewhat. An attorney still has to review but the process is getting better. Steve Friedman stated that it is easier but there are still issues with the language. Curt stated that we are able to pay \$20,000 for the surveys and other costs on a donated easement, and if all the easements go through that we currently have in process there would be about \$100,000 left. Curt stated that currently we are working to develop a new survey guideline to use.

Next meeting is scheduled for September 3, in Atlanta.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:45 a.m.

Kim Yawn, Senior Executive Assistant

Phil Foil, Executive Director